SOCIALITIES OF INDIGNATION:
Denouncing Party Politics in Karachi

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The Pakistani elections of 2013 boasted the highest voter turnout in twenty-five years, but a flurry of accusations of vote rigging and ballot stuffing—backed up by mobile-phone video—accompanied this success, as did demands for recounts and stories of eight-hour lineups at polling stations. In this essay, I discuss events six years earlier that stand in genealogical relation to this denunciation of party politics, focusing on indignation as an affect that both embraces and politicizes the ordinary in an explicitly moral register. Examining such emergent socialities may prompt ethnographers to reconsider what we recognize as political, and what we consider depoliticized.

In the aftermath of an episode of widespread political violence in Karachi, Pakistan, in 2007, city residents, who had retreated indoors in anticipation of the possible escalation of a political rally, produced and claimed a discourse of indignation and denunciation. I argue that their active non-participation in the political animosity, marked especially by their domestic confinement, constituted a form of political engagement. Naming the specifically moral transgressions of participants in urban violence, and contrasting them to a discourse of staying at home and waiting out the worst, generated the ordinary as a category of shared experience, operating as a mode of participation, and thus as a potential political position.[1] It is important not to mistake this tentative, fleeting, and in the end minimally effective sociality as a mere form of depoliticization. Rather than con-

sider the discourses of indignation, denunciation, and non-participation as evidence of a lack of engagement, I suggest that they articulate the possibility of conjuring and addressing an alternative, emergent public by recuperating the highly contingent righteousness of the ordinary.

The events precipitating this staging of indignation as a morally outspoken response to violence between political opponents have particular significance when considering future developments. Although ethnic animosity was conspicuously rejected as an explanation or justification for urban unrest in Karachi in May 2007, in the following four years political turf wars increasingly employed an ethnic register. In addition, independent live news television was subjected to growing state regulation, and the voices of residents became increasingly palpable through what Huma Yusuf (2012) refers to as citizen journalism.

On May 12, 2007, the visit of the ex–chief justice, dismissed by President General Pervez Musharraf, devolved into a series of armed altercations between opposition party supporters and those allied with the central government. Violence spilled onto the main roads, and live news television channels as a renegade judiciary became embroiled in the scales of federal and city politics. In response, Karachi residents claimed the position of non-participants in political violence through discursive indignation, made distinct by uttered denunciations and domestic confinement. Residents articulated a rejection of party politics in favor of adamant claims for moral decency and compassionate humanity, set apart from the supposed filth of ostensibly democratic institutions. As fleeting as it was unprecedented, the open vitriol against party politics was experienced and mediated through live television coverage, which the government outlawed soon afterward. Residents' vocal critiques constituted a moment where their anger interpellated millions of others who had similarly retreated into the safety of domestic space. Criticisms came from people with diverse class, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, crossing precisely those lines generally described and politicized as dividing them.

The tirades proved powerful, especially given the sideways glances and oblique references that had mostly characterized critiques of political violence in the past. Often, when describing political organizations, news media had feebly masked urban dynamics by referring anonymously to "a certain political party." Although after May 12 Karachi residents considered with wary distaste the city's entire elaborate party landscape, with its various ethnic and/or religious orientations, the party known as the MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or United Nationalist Movement) suffered by far the most emphatic denunciations.[2] Live television footage had shown representatives of numerous other parties, most of

which had sided with the dissenting judiciary, heavily armed as well, but the MQM occupied the most forcefully symbolic space in an imaginary of power, threats, and urban violence. In condemning the brutality of political parties in general, and of the MQM in particular, residents generated a discursive space constituted through negation.

DOMESTIC CONFINEMENT

May 12 was a Saturday, a half day of work. Almost everyone I knew stayed at home, prompted not only by the "holiday" announced by the government just before midnight the previous evening but also by the several days leading up to it. News reports about concurrent rallies called by political opponents, metal containers installed along the ex–chief justice's planned procession route, and banners painted in MQM colors draped along the same route foreshadowed a veritable showdown.

Staying indoors during periods of possible urban unrest was common for Karachi residents, and strikes called by political parties or last-minute holidays announced by the government in anticipation of possible disturbances in the city frequently influenced the decision not to go outside. Strikes had variable effects, depending on how seriously neighborhood residents took a party's veiled threats to close shops and stop traffic. In party strongholds, strikes would be observed for at least a few hours, but in more affluent areas disregard for city politics signaled elite prestige. Life generally returned to normal by the afternoons, once the symbolic point of the strike had been made, and stores opened to compensate for the morning's losses. The declaration of official holidays meant to minimize the presence of schoolchildren on the streets also provided justification for employees to stay at home, and served as a warning that the government would not be held responsible for people venturing into public spaces despite oblique injunctions not to.

For the entire evening of May 11 and throughout the following days, my relatives and I stayed glued to the television news channels, privatized since 2000, which featured live footage, looped images, correspondent reports, analysis, and ample call-in responses from viewers. Video featured men in various party colors bearing arms, shielding themselves from gunfire or carrying bloody victims, as well as cars and buses burning, riddled with bullets, or otherwise damaged. Reporters' voice-overs told of violence witnessed and the security forces' inaction in response. Later that evening, talk shows took caller after caller who described and denounced the political violence they had seen and would no longer tolerate.

This heavily mediated experience was complemented by a steady stream of text messages: "Are you watching Geo? Switch to Aaj. My mother won't let me step outside. 3 dead at Patel Para. All of this was planned by MQM." There were also phone conversations with relatives and friends in different parts of the city: "How is it where you are? Did you see what is happening at the airport?" And a mother pleading with the two cousins who had gone to work that morning: "Please come home now. Why did you go? You see, no one else was that stupid."

Even though our street was in a somewhat affluent neighborhood well away from the main roads, it was deserted. I saw none of the usual cars, pedestrians, vendors, or groups of children playing makeshift cricket. Members of the extended family from downstairs intermittently came over to watch television with us and to share the rumors and stories they had heard from their friends and family.

When I spoke with other people later, I learned that some had stayed home all day, while others had quickly returned there after encountering blockades or hearing reports and rumors while on early-morning errands. A friend had taken his father-in-law to the airport on his motorcycle, but then had found the route home closed off and himself trapped on the blockaded main boulevard for several hours. Acquaintances reported failed attempts at convincing security forces to let people through. The decision to stay at home or leave often seemed influenced by relatives, and going outside could mean having to tensely navigate the disciplinary strategies of alternately authoritative and tearfully pleading household members.

Like other Karachi residents whose relatives and friends occasionally forbade them to step outdoors, I understand my own domestic confinement on May 12 as a situated perspective and a form of participant observation. In doing so, I draw on Jessica Winegar's (2012, 68, 69, 70) assertion that domestic experiences of political events are critical not only in their potential to support or impede publicly staged claims but also because excluding what she terms "the hidden majority" conflates the iconic occupation of public space with spatial assertions about "the true locus of transformative politics." As such, considering experiences of domestic confinement during the events and aftermath of May 12 in Karachi not only documents diverse experiences of political conflict but also marks what I argue was an emergent sociality, where domesticity was staged as a political claim.

The very regularity of the practice of retreating indoors, relying on heavily mediated accounts of public space through television and interpersonal commu-

nication, enfolds the violence of exceptional events into everyday family relations. This observation draws on the work of Veena Das (1995, 2007, 2008) and Naveeda Khan (2006, 2012), who emphasize that the ordinary is where critical events are lived through the fabric of everyday experiences, which are informed, in turn, by the broader contexts that configure their potentialities. By this they suggest that anticipating domestic confinement as a result of publicly staged political claims, deciding when or whether to reemerge to resume routines, and negotiating with pleading relatives all shaped the quality of staying at home, waiting for the worst to be over.

The centrality of television, texting, and telephone conversations mediated the experience of cautious, self-imposed restrictions on mobility.[3] More than serving as a source of information, live television broadcasts marked the spectator as not being in public space. Thus the particular sociality constituted by watching news television mediated a surrogate perspective, where the domesticity of viewing emphasized a boundary between those who used public space outside their homes, on the main roads, and those who watched footage of that space from the safety of the indoors. As the events unfolded, television journalists reinforced that distinction by vocally distinguishing themselves and all other "decent" people who had retreated inside from those who occupied public space and thus perpetuated violent conflict.

This description of the events of May 12 is contracted because I do not wish to excavate violence as an object of analysis,[4] but instead, to examine how a sociality was temporarily constituted and articulated in relation to it. This methodology builds on efforts that use spectacular crises as starting points for investigating what they exclude, occlude, and produce (e.g., Daniel 1996; Krupa 2009, 21; Tambiah 1996). In the aftermath of May 12 in Karachi, the denunciations by avowed non-participants contrasted involvement in urban unrest with staying indoors. The indignation of residents in this framework thus presented a sociality enacted and staged by claiming domestic confinement as both a shared experience and an explicitly moral position; it figured these ordinary experiences as a political stance. As such, the circulation of indignant denunciation articulated a mode of political engagement that was more than simply depoliticized, terrorized, or fearful.[5]

Although fear might be an intuitive explanation for domestic confinement, I found that fear (_khauf, ḍarr_) was almost entirely absent from residents' narratives. Instead, I heard indirect attributions of actions to party workers in an explicitly moral register that overlapped with the social distinction of middle-class respect-

ability: Any involvement in politics was filthy and implicitly lower class. The scolding exhortations to exhibit decency and humane compassion (*insāniyat*), and to sustain civil relationships claimed a moral righteousness that I had learned to recognize as a sign of cultivated, articulate, well-mannered middle-class aspirations. Here, respectability became a moral orientation invoked and addressed through what Michael Warner (2002, 90–96) refers to as the "social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse." Although I had heard the conjuring of an "us" and a "we" through appeals to being "ordinary people" on several occasions, the claim seemed to pick up speed in the aftermath of May 12, suggesting that it was fueled by shared experiences that could be publicly staged.

Importantly, this sociality was tentative and emergent; It was by no means fully formed or explicitly articulated: It was a powerful, if fleeting, suggestion. As such, I limit my discussion to the word *sociality*, rather than committing to any one of the many stronger terms to describe solidarities, movements, or constituencies. Ultimately, the foray into public discourse receded into more occasional references and everyday comments, possibly due, in part, to the government-imposed censorship in June 2007 outlawing live television, images of politically sensitive violence, and supposedly exaggerated criticism of the government. Nonetheless, I suspect that the aftermath of May 12 generated a memory of how the people who stayed at home and waited for the worst to be over could imagine each other as a moral community, connected by their disapproval of, their active tactics of avoiding, and their shared subjection to political violence.

CONTEXT: The Event

May 12, 2007, was supposed to be an experiment in public national solidarity with the ex–chief justice of Pakistan, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, and the lawyers who supported him in the name of an independent judiciary, in protest against the executive branches of government under the regime of President General Musarraf.[6] After Chaudhry's dismissal by Musarraf in March 2007, a series of rallies, each larger than the previous one, had given a loose community of lawyers and judges from associations throughout Pakistan unprecedented status as a collective of politicized actors. The media carried images and stories of jubilant, defiant, and rowdy lawyers, who loudly called for Chaudhry's reinstatement as chief justice, arguing that his dismissal was unconstitutional. Political opposition parties—keen to capitalize on the opportunity to contest the current government, but also supporting the principle of an independent judiciary—quickly lent their support to the former chief justice, so that footage of swelling

crowds waving an array of familiar party flags became the visual mark of the momentum generated by Chaudhry's supporters.

Chaudhry was invited to address the Sindh High Court in Karachi on May 12, 2007, but when he and his entourage of lawyers arrived in the city, they were prohibited from leaving the Karachi airport and instead returned to the capital, Islamabad, several hours later. That day, blockades were set up at the airport and along Karachi's main arteries, gunfire was exchanged between members of various political parties, and vehicles were torched as security forces looked on without interfering. Violence was also reported at several widely dispersed, but symbolically key traffic intersections throughout the city. Later, the government paramilitary forces stationed at many sites of unrest maintained that they had received no orders to respond to the events. City morgues officially reported more than forty casualties, but rumors and authenticated reports spoke of more scuffles, injuries, and bodies during the following week. Many residents did not venture out of their homes for several days. Ultimately, the events of May 12 brought about urban violence on a city-wide scale for the first time in twelve years, dredging up memories of past political violence.

Although in the aftermath they expressed their indignation at politically motivated violence in general, the majority of residents directed their angry words at one party: the MQM. Most recently the MQM had participated in federal and provincial levels of the Pakistan government, as well as in Karachi's municipal administration.[7] The party has been described in terms of non-elite politics, ethnonationalism, "street nationalism" (Verkaaik 2004), and "counter-nationalism" (Naqvi 2006), but it has also been linked to organized intimidation and armed turf wars. Until 1997, the acronym MQM (Muttahida Qaumi Movement, or United Nationalist Movement) stood for the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (Muhajir Nationalist Movement). It is a Karachi-based political party founded in 1984, with a platform aimed expressly at a middle-class Urdu speakers, collapsing them, as an ethnic identity, with the historical category of Partition-era migrants from India (*muhajirs*). The party initially focused on the alleged social disenfranchisement of Urdu-speaking migrants, notably through the state imposition of quotas on government jobs and university admissions in the 1970s. These accommodations had meant to provide redress for underrepresented ethnic minorities, but the founders of the MQM and many others experienced them as discriminatory. In addition, the MQM provided a more secular and explicitly accessible, nonintellectual alternative to modernist Islamic parties, such as the Jamaat-e-Islami,

which had enjoyed substantial support from Karachi's muhajir community in the past.

Although the MQM claimed to address and mobilize muhajirs as an ethnic category, it did not do so consistently, exclusively, or uniformly. This became clear through a succession of often short-lived alliances between the MQM and various political groups, notably those associated with an ethnically inflected non-muhajir support base,[8] as well as through the party's more recent efforts at extending its influence beyond urban Sindh. As Nichola Khan (2010), Oskar Verkaaik (2004), and others have noted in more detailed histories of the MQM, the descendants of Partition-era migrants in Karachi are politically, religiously, and socioeconomically diverse. Their political involvement is distributed among religious and secular parties, and they show variable degrees of identification with the term muhajir as used by the MQM. Yet despite the party's name change aimed at addressing broader constituencies, the MQM's platform continues to politicize muhajir identity in an implicitly ethnic register.

From the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, MQM activities were associated with widespread popular support, gruesome turf wars, and ethnic conflict in urban Sindh. Several factors fueled this situation, including the availability of weaponry, factional intra-party violence and target killings, and competition over territorial rights to collect revenue from protection rackets. In Karachi, the government on several occasions deployed the police and military to impose curfews, round up profiled or suspected militants, and execute extrajudicial killings to eliminate so-called street nationalists, most frequently in working-class neighborhoods considered MQM strongholds and designated no-go areas. For example, in 1992, government attempts to suppress urban violence in Karachi resulted in Operation Cleanup, in which military forces for twenty-nine months occupied and purged the city of alleged young male party activists. Following the operation, the MQM's radicalized side was tempered by the party's gradual incorporation into mainstream politics through a series of coalitions and negotiations with the federal government. From 2005 to 2011, the MQM led Karachi's elected city government under the local government system then in force, accruing a reputation for effective governance through infrastructural renewal and service provision, while representing the majority of city constituencies in the Provincial and National Assemblies.

Despite a newfound strategy of progressive moderation and municipal governance, the MQM continued to maintain antagonistic territorial relations with standing historical rivals.[9] The resilience of these familiar tensions became in-

creasingly apparent in the ethnically tinged, targeted violence of late 2008, which escalated to a large-scale ethnopolitical turf war in the summer of 2011. Allegations of ethnic conflict in the local and transnational media failed to take into account that the violence occurred in areas where several parties competed over turf and that the claim of ethnic solidarity as a justification for violent conflict had not been consistently effective in Karachi's history. May 12, 2007, is a watershed for its failed attempt to recuperate ethnic difference as a justification for urban violence,[10] and for the frank denunciations made by those who cast themselves as ordinary residents. Their discourse reminds us that ethnic politics are neither consistent nor ubiquitous, and perhaps more important, that people in Karachi do not always deem ethnicity a plausible explanation for political violence. Criticisms of the MQM thus accused the party of reiterating violent approaches to familiar animosities between political rivals and of using its municipal resources to plan and organize a partisan conflict, rather than exerting restraint as responsible leaders of elected government.

In May 2007, the MQM not only led the municipal city government but was also one of the few parties allied with the ruling coalition, and thus with Musharraf's PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League–Quaid-e-Azam).[11] Although the MQM was widely believed to have transitioned into a moderate and progressive party at the time, it continued to be associated with the volatility and armed street violence of the 1980s and 1990s. This situation gave the federal government a potentially threatening ally in Karachi, whose presence would undermine the possibility of openly criticizing Musharraf's administration. The association between the city and federal political authority was made explicit through a central government rally held in Islamabad later in the evening of May 12, where Musharraf and his supporters delivered bland pro-government speeches from behind a podium protected by bullet-proof glass, despite or perhaps because of the bloodshed in Karachi.[12]

Symbolically challenging Chaudhry's visit to Karachi, MQM representatives also held a concurrent rally, set up blockades preventing access to event venues, and draped banners painted in party colors over pedestrian bridges and billboards along the former chief justice's procession route. The party's menacing statements in the preceding days were compounded on May 12 by the presence of armed gunmen of various affiliations on the overpasses overlooking the procession route, among pro-Chaudhry demonstrators, and along routes leading to the concurrent MQM rally.

SOCIALITIES OF INDIGNATION

The outrage expressed by residents who had stayed in their homes, as well as by journalists and victims caught in the cross fire of political violence, fashioned a sociality articulated on the moral ground of non-participation and domestic confinement. Indignation as an affect that was recognized, shared, and communicable drew attention to the formation of a fragile and tentative public constituted through circulating expressions and reiterations of denunciation. As such, May 12 marked a significant, if short-lived, turning point where angry words became explicit, rather than remaining hidden in oblique references and abstract formulations. The direct quality of the critiques, as well as their orientation toward an unruly MQM sanctioned by the Musharraf government, marked a departure for otherwise much more cautious Karachi residents.

Television

Television reports seemed to instigate immediate outbreaks of street violence and shoot-outs in different parts of the city, notably along the former chief justice's procession route and in areas considered MQM strongholds, especially at intersections near the proposed MQM rally and in neighborhoods where ANP (Awami National Party) turf bordered MQM turf. Two turning points in live media coverage intensified the explicit critiques and thus mediated the sense of indignation as a shared experience. In the first, gunmen of various affiliations, who had been shooting at each other from rooftops and alleys near a central intersection on the road from the MQM heartland to the planned rally, began bombarding the Aaj TV studios as cameramen and journalists reported from the balcony. The images became iconic: A crouching journalist, filmed by a crouching cameraman, angrily describing how he felt compelled to take cover. Through the channel's coverage, TV hosts became outspoken, critical, and unguarded. The second turning point came in the form of candid commentary by Geo TV's news analyst Dr. Shahid Masood. On the evening of May 12, he, in impeccable Urdu, stated calmly and baldly that violence was not an acceptable political strategy. No fear marked his language, only the righteous moral high ground of a reprimand: Violence would no longer be tolerated.

Denouncing the MQM

Although denunciations were mediated by live television, viewers used the information, images, and commentary as a starting point for their speculations and indignant critiques. The Karachi University student Farid Bhai texted me to

ask who I thought was responsible for the developments. He did not agree with my feeble poststructuralist notion of a polysemic, conjunctural causality, asserting instead: "All of this is planned by MQM." As we watched the news on the morning of May 12, voice-overs asked about the whereabouts of the thousands of security forces who had allegedly been deployed in Karachi for this day. My aunt was furious that the chief justice had supposedly refused the offer of helicopter transport to the Sindh High Court, where he was supposed to deliver an address. "Now so many people will die," she said; "he should have returned to Islamabad as soon as he realized what was happening." My uncle paced the hallways, remaining within earshot of the blaring television, saying that MQM people were keeping the former chief justice from leaving the airport. Later, photographs of flag-bearing groups of men on motorcycles in front of the main terminal, and magazine articles about shoot-outs on the airport grounds, made this assertion difficult to refute. Scathing television commercials blended tracks of the national anthem with a hopeful patriotic poem wishing Pakistan progress and prosperity, accompanying looped footage of politicians, bleeding civilians, burning vehicles, and people bearing different party flags running away or beating others.

Most significantly, although these viewers' reactions were shaped by media images and discourses, as well as by their self-imposed domestic confinement, their words anticipated MQM tactics that live television only suggested. They voiced targeted denunciations and vocal disgust hours before the journalists were shot at, hours before the MQM rally was televised, and hours before Dr. Masood bluntly reprimanded the MQM for violent tactics on screen. Viewers drew on memories of political violence from the 1990s, and in the following weeks, several people commented, "Yes, but it was nothing compared to 1992." This audience combined the news provided by journalists with its own understanding of contexts. My cousin returned from his brief morning stint at work to report that several dozen of his coworkers had camped out at the office because they did not think they could get home safely. Many of them lived in or near areas with reported shoot-outs or close to blockaded roads. Farid Bhai maintained that only the MQM, with its access to municipal resources and a long history of organized street violence, could have arranged blockades on such short notice. My uncle, who had been a journalist for the Urdu press since the 1970s, made shrewd observations based on what seemed to me mere snippets of information. I realized that this audience had lived through long periods of state censorship, and was thus accustomed to reading between the lines.

During the following week, I heard dozens of accounts from a wide range of Karachi residents. In conversations, television call-in comments, blog posts, and news articles, critiques focused on gunfights, killings, and on the fact of addressing political confrontation through urban warfare and intimidation. Although commentators widely acknowledged that workers from various parties both participated in and were victims of these activities, they singled out the MQM for appropriating organizational resources and acting as a provocateur on behalf of its federal ally. The earliest report of firing on a group of lawyers in the ANP-dominated area adjacent to the airport, which was immediately followed by reports of shoot-outs in several other locations, was also widely attributed to the MQM. People shared the stories about threats, blockades, and rumors that they had heard through neighbors, relatives, and coworkers. The common thread that ran through the observations held the MQM responsible for the violence because the party had supposedly instigated it.

During the eleven months that I had already spent in Karachi, people had been much more wary: Although they had criticized the MQM in the safety of their homes and offices, in whispers and vague allusions, their disapproval had been accompanied by furtive glances over shoulders and through windows, and comfortable conversations had abruptly stopped when someone of unknown political affiliation entered the room. Now these same people shared stories that were never on television: Cars on the main boulevard had been flagged down and drivers asked their political affiliation—the "wrong" answer got them shot point blank; MQM organizers had used privately owned vehicles for the blockades at the Sindh High Court; political animosity slid into an ethnic register pitting muhajirs against Pashtuns, who were associated with the ANP; MQM gunmen on pedestrian bridges had fired into procession crowds; opposition-party gunmen had returned fire with semiautomatic weaponry; party workers apprehended by rivals had been tortured; a man was told that it would be better to remove his trousers and shirt, and go home in his underwear, than risk being taken for a muhajir (this implied that everyone else wore *shalwar kameez*, the loose traditional garment associated, for men, with piety and laborers).

Farid Bhai, an Urdu-speaker who occasionally attended MQM rallies for fun (see Verkaaik 2004) and was on friendly terms with high-ranking party members who had been his neighbors in childhood, explained why the events of May 12 came as such a shock. People thought that the MQM had changed, he said, echoing the commentary on television talk shows. For the past four years, Farid Bhai claimed, they had stopped taking *bhattā* (protection money), or at least demanded

it less often than before. "I thought they changed," he reiterated, "once they entered the city government. But I was wrong; they organized everything." His words reflected the disillusionment of many Karachi residents who, prior to May 12, had thought that armed conflict over political territory was a thing of the past. Farid Bhai was disappointed and, like many others I spoke to, frustrated.

Other Karachi residents described the operation of an economy of intimidation. Reiterating an assertion common in interviews conducted after May 12, a Punjabi man in his sixties, who lived in a middle-class neighborhood known as an MQM stronghold, said that the party had been wrong to hold a rally on the same day as the former chief justice. He explained that the MQM got votes on the basis of *dahshat* (terror) and k̲h̲auf (fear). He did not describe this fear as paralyzing, but instead told of how on May 12, while the bazaar on the main road had been closed, the small neighborhood shops deep inside the maze of alleys had eventually opened up. Then, he said, "laṛke motorcycles pe ā gaye the" (the boys on motorcycles came) and told them to close the shops again. This happened three times—the stores would tentatively reopen and the boys would tell them to close again. He explained to me that this was the type of hold that the MQM had in the neighborhood: It could threaten to shoot people, keep them scared, and send boys on motorcycles to close shops; people were afraid. Yet I noted that they had clearly grown less wary about this situation, identifying the party and its actions, by name. In previous conversations, this man had made only the vaguest allusions to the party whose turf he lived on. By now naming the party and describing the almost defiant reopening of stores, he contrasted party workers with ordinary people who shared the moral and political position of being subjected to threats and intimidation. By describing his subjection in terms of neighbors and local shops, he identified domestic confinement as something that many residents in the vicinity had shared. This was a tentative, emergent, and yet unprecedentedly articulate enunciation of an implicit sociality—it began to imagine a "we" and named an agent enforcing the common experience of choosing, but at the same time being compelled, to stay inside. In openly and directly sharing these details, sitting beside two open windows of his small home, the man contributed to the circulation of a broader critical discourse of indignation.

The Politics of Staying Out of Politics

The discursive contrast couched in terms of indignation should not suggest that residents and news commentators did not hold any political sympathies or affiliations. Instead, as Nichola Khan (2012) carefully observes, it was common

for neighborhood residents to draw on varied resources of social capital, even when they crossed ethnic or party lines. For example, Farid Bhai sympathized with the Jamaat-e-Islaami, but he also had several friends in the MQM. This did not stop him from indignantly asserting that the MQM had provoked and organized the political violence of May 12, nor did it stop his mother from insisting that he remain at home for two days. A muhajir woman married into a Punjabi family that had historically supported the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) had petitioned an MQM-affiliated coworker to intervene into neighborhood construction efforts on her behalf in time for her son's wedding. This had not stopped her from criticizing the armed workers of the opposition party, the former chief justice, the security forces, and especially the MQM for their roles in sustaining the urban unrest.

Before May 12, residents who I knew had sympathies for or histories of affiliation with longtime opponents of the MQM had spoken about the party with measured optimism as the mayor initiated infrastructural changes to major traffic arteries and drainage systems, as incidences of political violence seemed to decrease, and as reports suggested the less zealous collection of protection monies. The escalation of more familiar problems—such as load shedding due to inadequate electrical supply, or inflation and unemployment—were attributed to forces beyond municipal control: privatized corporations and the federal management of the economy. Thus, part of what made the indignant critiques of the MQM so notable after May 12 was not only their explicit character but also that they occurred at a moment when the party had been accruing a reputation for responsible governance. While discourses differentiating armed party activists from those who had stayed at home focused on the provocations attributed to the organizational skills of the MQM, they also presented a departure from the more fluid connections between residents with variably formalized political affiliations and sympathies.

The compulsion to stay at home on May 12 differed from comparable previous instances of waiting for the worst to be over. Whereas street protests against electricity cuts, road accidents, or political causes may have featured milling groups of men throwing rocks or burning tires and buses, such events tended to be highly localized and limited to particular neighborhoods or intersections. In addition, curfews called by political parties were most effectively enforced in areas considered the turf or contested turf of that group. Many schools carefully observed all curfews to ensure the safety of their students, but adults could

circumvent localized disruptions by changing travel routes or times, or by just trying their luck.

May 12, however, differed in that it affected the entire city: Tense symbolic confrontations or exchanges of gunfire occurred in multiple locations kilometers apart. Moreover, the sixteen-kilometer-long blockaded procession route, the concurrent MQM route and rally location, and the several thousand security forces stationed around the city extended the spaces of potential confrontation beyond particular, contained localities. This spatial scale was heightened through equally unprecedented independent live news television coverage and mobile communications technologies, which continually mediated the territorial simultaneity of urban unrest, not only for those who stayed at home but also for party workers, who seemed to retaliate in new areas moments after an initial armed confrontation was reported. Such dispersed yet mediated sites of violence justify considering the shared experience of domestic confinement in terms of an emergent public, rather than through the localized spatial lenses of specific neighborhoods.

Finally, May 12 was distinct from other events because it mobilized a moralized discourse that not only singled out one instigator but used indignant denunciation as an idiom of differentiation. Specific references to compassion and respectability underscored the vocal othering of political violence, thus contrasting the reports and images of unrest with the implicitly middle-class decency that invoked itself as normatively unmarked. For example, an elderly, ethnically Pashtun Partition-era migrant who had been involved with the PPP three decades earlier and who now lived with his sons in a northern neighborhood close to contested political turf, spat out a familiar sentiment in the days after May 12: "Is mulk meṅ siyāsat nahīṅ hai, ṣirf badmaʿshī" (There are no politics in this country, only hooliganism). He went on to exclaim that they used guns to deal with each other, invoking a "they" consisting of delinquent hooligans. By implication, his narrative conjured a normative, more cultivated "we" who could envision politics without resorting to armed encounters. The morality of restraint that drew on manners and decency was even more explicit in a comment on an English-language blog:

> One bullet is fired and then nobody knows who is on whose side. Every political confrontation devolves into a gang-fight and people wanting a political change stay at home to watch the massacre in their city. In all honesty, ask how many *shareef* [respectable] Karachiites actually went outside to support one party or the other? Our *sharaafat* [implicitly pious, respectable

strata] stayed at home, in *purdah* [veiled, concealed by a curtain, segregated, usually women from men].

(Bilal Zuberi, comment to Najam [2007], May 12, 2007)

The idiom of respectability operationalized terms associated with piety and modesty, *sharāfat* and *purdah*, to contrast politicized violence, and even political action more broadly, with the moral position of domestic confinement. Of course, this comment could also be read as a satire of subjection rationalized as implicitly pious decency. More important, however, its ambivalent quality points to the emergence of a political sensibility that is expressed through a discourse of nonparticipation in political violence through domestic confinement, where staying at home is both a voluntary action and an external imposition.

Figuring the respectability of retreating from public space in contrast to the hooliganism of political violence posits a normative order subordinated to domesticity. As Lubna Chaudhry (2004) and others have emphasized, "multileveled" relations of power situate the possibilities of agency and critique in urban Pakistan (see also Chaudhry and Bertram 2009; Nichola Khan 2010, 2012; Verkaaik 2004). Nested hegemonies of generational and gendered domestic authority position young men who act without morally normative restraint, by engaging in street violence or aligning themselves with party objectives, as uncontrolled or uncontrollable, rather than directly with familial, patriarchal hierarchies. Thus the complex individual relationships young male activists negotiate in relation to their families and militancy, whether asserting generational independence (Verkaaik 2004) or the possibility of self-transformation (Nichola Khan 2010, 2012), are obscured in popular discourses that frame them as hooligans and denounce their involvement in urban unrest, by virtue of not staying at home, as a moral failing. The scolding tone assumed by critics of political violence in the aftermath of May 12 subsumed street tactics to a privatized familial order that located a moral political alternative in the shared experiences of denunciation and domestic confinement.

CONCLUSION

I have discussed a sociality of indignation as tentative, emergent, and, ultimately, as the suggestion of a public constituted through three claims: that domestic confinement was a shared experience, political violence was morally reprehensible, and that the MQM deserved to be denounced for its actions. These made for an unusually explicit set of assertions among Karachi residents otherwise

much more cautious and oblique in their criticisms. It located the possibility of a sociality in the distinction of morally decent persons who had stayed indoors and away from inter-party conflict. As such, invoking moral norms through discourses of non-participation conjured the ordinary as a political location, positing domestic confinement as a collective experience and indignation as a mode of participation that relied on moral affect as a political stance. I would like to recuperate, rather than dismiss, this range of specifically located, if ultimately ineffective, discourses of indignation.

Scholars of the anthropology of democracy, notably Julia Paley (2001) and Lucia Michelutti (2008), have focused on the quality of participation as an object of ethnographic analysis. Non-participation and domestic confinement are frequently taken as evidence of depoliticization, rather than as a relational mode of participation. The fleeting socialities described here may be marginalized in meta-narratives of democratization, but they point toward a diversity of participatory modalities that have the potential to mobilize the moral registers of the ordinary. Such powerful (though often ineffective) social formations that, according to Manuel Castells (2012), connect outrage with hope, draw attention to the Karachi residents whose denunciations suggest a solidarity at the interstices of political action and transformation.

The particular, suddenly overt condemnations of party politics in the aftermath of May 12 fashioned a sociality that interpellated imagined others through the criticisms' circulation. Yet the discourses of outrage did not develop into movements following liberal forms of collective territorial mobilization through processions and dissent in public space. The casualties and injuries of May 12 had resulted precisely from an attempt to engage such fantasies of peaceful civil society protest; instead, the indignation that followed was located in a domestic confinement framed as moral terrain that opened up the suggestion that being compelled to stay inside during moments of crisis could, perhaps, become contestable.

ABSTRACT

In May 2007, in the aftermath of city-wide urban unrest mediated by live news television, Karachi residents clamored noisily, using rumors, blogs, and SMS texting to overtly denounce the violence and intimidation ploys of political parties. Their discourse took a particular form: It described the violent tactics of organized politics as repulsive, suggested the moral respectability of avoiding such party politics, and, most important, articulated the impetus to domestic confinement—being compelled to stay at home—as a shared experience. Rather than conflate the discursive content of non-participation with depoliticization, it is important to acknowledge the con-

tingent sociality of recognizing and articulating domestic confinement as a shared experience through the indignant denunciation of political institutions. Such tactics invoke an emergent public that recuperates and politicizes the ordinary in an explicitly moral register. [participation; violence; depoliticization; publics]

NOTES

1. Anthropological interventions mobilizing the ordinary draw on the philosophical legacies emphasizing complex contextual descriptions of everyday life in the work of John Austin, Stanley Cavell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Notable efforts to grapple with this term include Veena Das's (2007) astute observations that the everyday is an achievement engaging the experiential uncertainties of skepticism and Michael Lambek's (2010, 3) anthology exploring how everyday ethical sensibilities "draw on and are drawn into the ordinary."

2. The research is based on thirteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in Karachi, Pakistan, between July 2006 and July 2007. For more on the MQM, which will be discussed further in a later section, see, for example, Ahmed 1998, Baig 2008, Gayer 2007, Kennedy 1991, Nichola Khan 2010, Naqvi 2006, Shaheed 1990, Tambiah 1996, Verkaaik 1994, 2004. Print journalism in the Karachi-based weekly English-language news magazine *Herald* is especially rich and informative.

3. Formidable scholarship on television viewership and the politics of television in India includes Mankekar 1999, Rajagopal 2001, and, more recently, A. Jain 2010 and K. Jain 2010. For an account of citizen journalism through online blogs and cell-phone content in Pakistan that traces government censorship of independent news channels through 2007–2008 but conspicuously omits May 12 in Karachi, see Yusuf 2012.

4. For a more detailed account of May 12, 2007, see HRCP 2007 and the June 2007 issue of *Newsline* magazine.

5. Elsewhere, I discuss the tactics of avoiding involvement in political violence that also operate as subjection in Karachi (Ahmad 2011).

6. At the time of writing, Chaudhry holds the post of chief justice of Pakistan, having been reinstated, resuspended, held under federally imposed house arrest, and eventually reinstated once more. After being suspended by Musharraf, he was initially reinstated as chief justice in July 2007 by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, who maintained that Musharraf's actions in dismissing him had been illegal. Chaudhry was again suspended by Musharraf under the state of emergency in effect between November and December 2007, when he and several other Supreme Court judges refused to support the Provisional Constitutional Order validating the temporary suspension of the constitution. Chaudhry, like other judges, was held under state-sanctioned house arrest, although in his case restrictions extended to his immediate family and were lifted only in March 2008, following the general elections, on Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's first day in office. One year later, in March 2009, Chaudhry was officially reappointed as the chief justice of Pakistan by the newly elected government of President Asif Ali Zardari. The immediate context of the events in Karachi in May 2007 describe a particular moment in this longer saga, which was accompanied throughout by regular and vocal

demonstrations by groups of lawyers throughout the country, but most conspicuously in Islamabad and Lahore.

7. The MQM led the Karachi municipal government from 2005 until local government was eliminated as part of administrative reforms under the Zardari regime in July 2011. Although in the 2013 general elections more than five hundred MQM candidates ran for federal and provincial office across Pakistan, the party won seats only in urban Sindh, securing nearly twenty constituencies and almost all the National Assembly seats in Karachi (*Elections.com.pk* 2013a, 2013b; MQM 2013). Leading up to the elections, several political rallies held by parties with historically strong representation were bombed, allegedly by the Pakistani Taliban. In Karachi, this included the MQM (see Kazmi 2013). The targeted violence followed a series of sectarian bombings in early 2013, also attributed to the Pakistani Taliban. These events have altered the terrain of two prior years of sustained turf wars among political party rivals, which peaked in the summer of 2011.

8. This includes, for example, bouts of cooperation with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), whose support base was long associated with Sindhi identity, and with the Pakistan Muslim League (PML), associated with an ethnically Punjabi support base.

9. Long-term rival political parties include the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Pashtuns as an ethnic and political category through the Awami National Party (ANP).

10. This failure is significant because it marked a new strategy to reanimate ethnic animosity that seemed to gain traction in the ensuing four years. It developed through the ongoing, if sporadic, occurrence of target killings—notably of Pashtun shopkeepers—that were eventually reported in the news media in terms of ethnic conflict rather than as a takeover of resources *(qabza)* or a way to provoke retaliation. On the conceptual significance of qabza in Pakistan, see Ewing 2010, Hull 2010, and Naveeda Khan 2012.

11. Musharraf's PML-Q (Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam) drew most of its support base from Punjab. The additional member of the ruling coalition was the PML-F (Pakistan Muslim League-Functional).

12. The pro-government rally was the subject of much criticism mediated through the independent news outlets. Appropriating resources to light an evening rally seemed extravagant when current regulations required Islamabad businesses to close in the early evenings due to electricity rationing. In addition, the rally, which claimed eighty thousand attendees, coincided with an officially declared impromptu holiday for government employees. This suggested that the audience consisted of the employees who had been given the day off. The lack of audience commitment was emphasized by live television images of continually milling crowds who seemed only vaguely attentive to the politicians' speeches, even as President General Musharraf took the podium, raising his arms to gesturally acknowledge, if not interpellate, the supposed adulation of the circulating crowd. Ultimately, much criticism I heard focused on the emphatic distaste for the insolence of staging a triumphalist political spectacle just hours after a full day of violence and death in Karachi.

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